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Finding yourself

Understanding yourself and relating to others

Andy Turnbull

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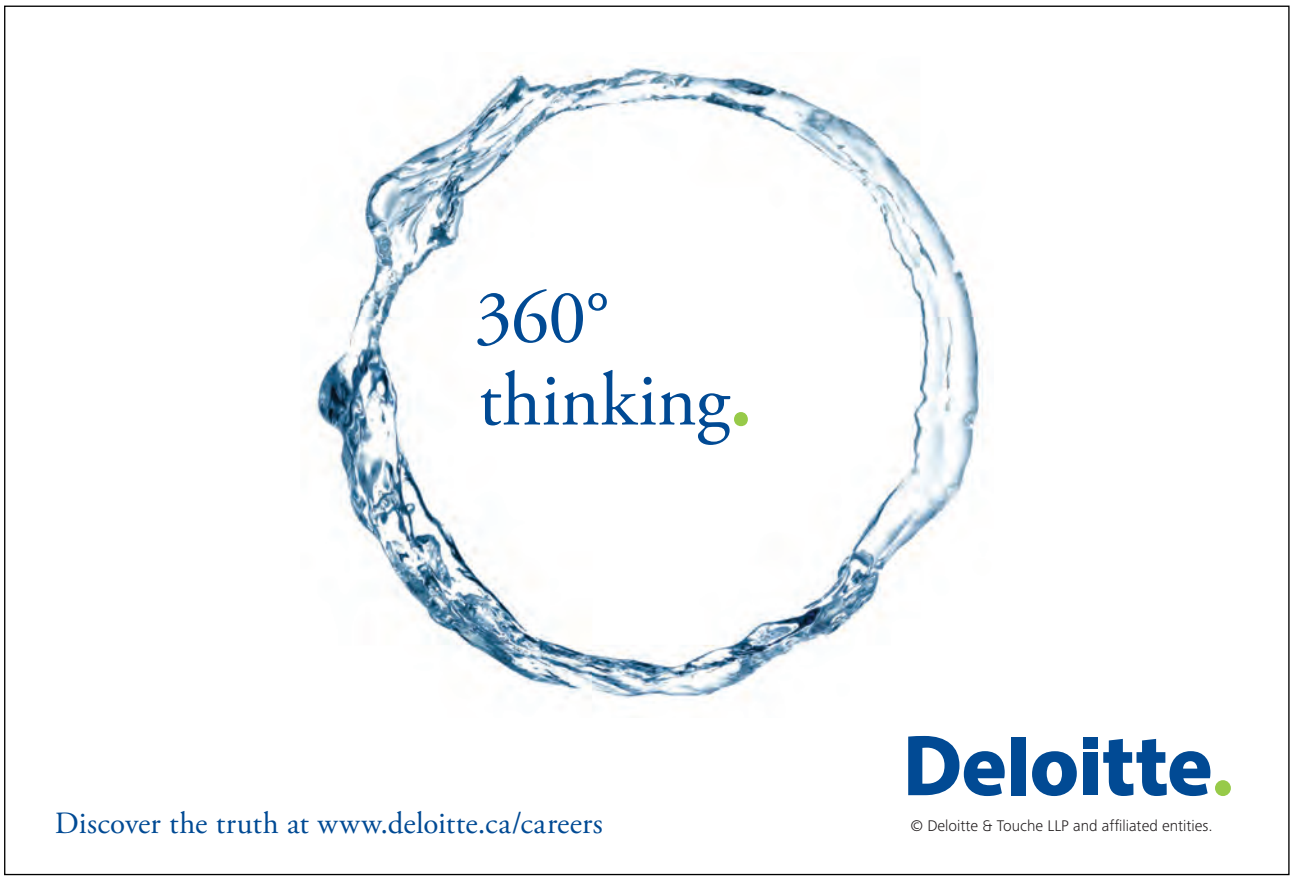

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Introduction

"He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened." – Lao Tzu

Do you sometimes wonder who you really are?

Do you feel that you are constantly adapting yourself to suit the needs of others?

Do you have multiple, conflicting roles in life that leave you feeling confused or compromised?

Do you feel that you are not relating to others as effectively as you would like?

We live in a complicated world that seems to expect us to be lots of different things all at the same time. Very rarely are we called on just to be ourselves – yet strangely when we see that in others we applaud it and call it things like "individuality", "charisma" and "inspiring leadership".

So why is it that true individuality in others seems inspiring and yet individuality for ourselves can seem impossible – or at least impractical? And if we do "find ourselves", how do we then relate to others in new ways?

In this book we will explore how we become the people that we are, how and why we "lose ourselves" – and what we can do about it.

It then goes on to set out how we can relate to others more effectively and develop high levels of interpersonal skills, enabling us to be our true selves – and create the space for others around us to do that too.

Andy Turnbull has spent well over 15 years in various management and leadership roles within organisations. He now runs his own coaching and consulting business – Andy Turnbull Coaching. He particularly works with people who have recognised that continuously trying to be something else or adapting themselves to suit their environment can come at too high a personal cost and now want to get in touch with their true selves, living in harmony with their authentic nature and the world about them.

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Andy Turnbull works with individuals who wish to develop their own unique coaching management style and develop their own authentic leadership style – an investment in themselves for a happier, more fulfilling, creative and productive present – and future.

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Part 1 – Understanding yourself

"Know thyself" – Socrates

It is said that back in ancient Greece the phrase "know thyself" was inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. The ancient Greek philosophers realised that knowing yourself was an essential pre-requisite for all wisdom. Socrates focussed upon knowing himself because there is little point in knowing about external things if you do not understand yourself first.

Of course in childhood the main emphasis was put on knowing things and accumulating knowledge about the world in order to pass exams and get good grades. Knowing and understanding yourself is not a subject that gets examined and may not feature heavily, if at all, whilst growing up. It is left to chance later in life, if indeed it is ever actively on the agenda.

As adults we do not need to leave it to chance and can take responsibility for understanding ourselves at any point. We are able to take what we have learnt from others, reflect on our life experiences and discover for ourselves who and what we are.

Not knowing yourself has broad implications for how you live your life and relate to others. A fuller version of the quote expands the point:

> *"My friend…care for your psyche…know thyself, for once we know ourselves, we may learn how to care for ourselves"*

If you do not know and understand yourself you will not be able to take care of yourself; without being in touch with yourself, you will not be able to truly get in touch with others; without understanding yourself, you will not be in a position to understand and relate to others effectively.

A true relationship with yourself is necessary for a true relationship with others. If you can blow away the fog of confusion that gets in the way of you seeing yourself as you really are, you will be able to see others emerging from the mist more clearly too.

Socrates says that the main priority of life is to find yourself – and, if you choose, you can become the world's expert on yourself. This is the path of personal growth and development and ultimately no-one can have a better understanding of yourself than you.

The chapters in the first part of this book examine various ways in which we can understand ourselves, looking at what others have said about being human, at how we develop as individuals, what motivates us, some of the consequences and what we can do about it.

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1 Understanding human beings

To understand ourselves as individuals, a good place to start is to examine what other people have already said on the subject of human beings more widely.

Understanding the human condition has been a topic for many of the world's great thinkers for hundreds of years and even longer. We have already heard the view of one philosopher in the quote from Socrates.

In more recent times a more objective scientific approach has been adopted and a number of theories have been put forward for what drives and motivates us as human beings. We will begin by examining a selection of these key theories to see if there are any conclusions we can draw from the different disciplines.

1.1 The evolutionary biologists' view

1.1.1 Darwin

From a physiological, evolutionary perspective all human beings, like other animals are driven by evolution to pass on their genetic code to the next generation – to reproduce. You will have heard of Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, where each animal or species competes with the other for limited resources. The weakest die out whilst the strongest survive and they are then able to pass on their genes to the next generation. So evolution favours those that adapt to their environment the best – and when the best interests of the individual animal coincides with the best interests of the group, the group survives as well.

This could lead you to believe that competing, fighting and putting yourself first is the natural way of things – yet this does not really explain how human society's work. There is clearly altruism operating in society where one person looks after another, rather than everyone always acting in their own narrow self-interest, so maybe there's a piece of the story missing.

1.1.2 Dawkins

In 1976 the scientist Richard Dawkins famously talked about evolution and his ideas of what motivates us in his book *The Selfish Gene*. In it he argues that it is not the *human being* that wants to reproduce so much as the *gene* that wants to ensure it continues to exist beyond the lifetime of the human that it inhabits.

At a simple level one might assume that once you have got past the age of reproducing, evolution has no more need for you and you are thrown on the scrapheap – in effect your purpose for living ends once your children are sufficiently grown to be independent and have "flown the nest".

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Richard Dawkins however has a much more interesting and illuminating insight about the selfish gene. He was curious to explain why altruistic behaviour exists, not just in humans but in the wider animal kingdom. The conclusion was that it is not the individual animal that wants to reproduce (although they clearly do), at a deeper level it is as if the *gene* wants to ensure its survival. So in a family or close community – a tribe – there is a willingness to be altruistic and support others at the expense of themselves to increase the chances of the shared genetic code surviving and getting passed on.

There is a common misconception that the "selfish gene" means that we are all programmed to be selfish – that is almost the exact opposite of what he is saying, the gene is selfish for itself and will sacrifice the human it inhabits for ensure its survival, it is not that it drives the individual human to be selfish.

We are designed to be in a community, to live in tribes and ensure that it – and the genetic code within it – survives. Survival is not just for our own individual sake, or for the sake of those around us because we want to survive comfortably, but altruism is literally in our DNA. Relating to others and supporting others is a natural – and evolutionary necessary – aspect of our human nature.

Most people would tend to assume that the only driver of evolution at an individual level is to reproduce and to have children. Richard Dawkins suggests that this not quite it – as supporting the families and tribes is in the selfish gene's best interests, i.e. supporting the environment where children can be born and flourish is also a key driver of human nature.

1.2 The psychologists' view

1.2.1 Freud and Jung

Psychology has constantly tried to understand what motivates us. For example Sigmund Freud, the renowned German psychoanalyst, introduced the concept of the unconscious mind, where many human motivations exist, hidden from conscious awareness – and bringing those into consciousness was one of the main objectives of psychoanalysis. Freud proposed the idea that the main motivator in the unconscious was the libido.

His student, Carl Jung, also a psychoanalyst, developed different theories. For Jung the purpose of life was about "individuation" – becoming fully ourselves, a movement towards the ideal of wholeness. As Jung said – "the privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are."

It is this approach that which underlies a great deal of personal growth and development – there is potential in people which can be released and developed. "Finding yourself" is neither automatic not easy, it is however to Jung the core purpose of a human life.

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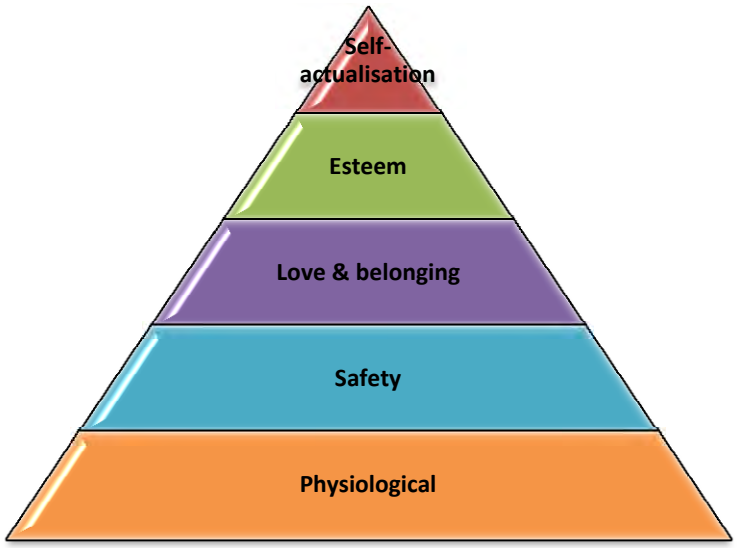
1.2.2 Maslow

In 1943 Abraham Maslow developed a theory of motivation based on looking at well developed people, as opposed to the psychologists who studies people who are not in a mentally healthy state. His theory suggested that there are a range of needs that each person is motivated to meet and this "hierarchy of needs" is a well documented and much cited model – see the diagram below.



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The idea is that each person needs to satisfy the most basic needs before proceeding up the hierarchy. At the lowest, most basic level, people are motivated by *physiological* needs – food, water, shelter and sleep for example. Then they are motivated by *safety* – the absence of threat. For example this could include being part of a family, having an income and a safe place to live – in Western society this is more around psychological safety than physical safety.

Third comes *love and belonging,* which introduces emotional and inter-personal needs which are absent from the first two levels. This could include building friendships and establishing a family, being in relationship with other individuals and groups. People are motivated by an absence of a feeling of love and belonging.

Fourth comes *esteem* and self-esteem which derive from achievement or mastery in some form. Esteem from others comes the recognition received from external achievements. This can lead to desires for fame, status and prestige, perhaps found through a profession or hobby. Self-esteem, or self-respect is derived from the satisfaction of achieving something, like a certain level of competence or knowledge in something. The respect arises internally rather than being dependent upon an external person.

Maslow suggests that when all these needs have been met, then a fifth need arises, the need for *self-actualisation*. This is the idea of becoming oneself fully, to fulfil one's potential and become "everything that one is capable of becoming". How this expresses itself is by definition unique to the individual and could be anything from art to understanding, and from peace to living up to an ideal. This is about what gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

There is much debate about this model and not all needs will sit in this hierarchy for everyone and different societies may experience some of the needs in a different order, but the overall message is clear.

The concept of self-actualisation echoes and is consistent with the work of Jung – individuation and self-actualisation amount to much the same thing. The key point is that what ultimately drives us in life is personal development. This is an ongoing process and "finding yourself" is the result of this positive growth tendency that both cite.

Maslow suggests that the self-actualising person is more integrated, happier and more contented, more able to take responsibility and better able to relate to others. Understanding yourself and relating to others go hand in hand.

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1.3 The management theorists' view

A third lense through which to look at what motivates us is the study of what motivates people at work. Modern management theory started during the industrial revolution with a focus on how to make labour more productive, i.e. how to motivate employees to work harder and produce more in the same time. We will briefly examine two theories from this perspective, from McGregor and Herzberg.

1.3.1 McGregor

In the 1960s, Douglas McGregor proposed that staff could be motivated differently depending upon the attitude that they brought to work. He came up with two types of employee, theory X and theory Y. Theory X employees generally dislike work and are motivated by external pressure from their managers and the money that they will take home at the end of the day. They are not motivated by the work itself, but by external factors (extrinsic motivation). Managers who assume that their employees are theory X (or who perhaps are theory X themselves) will attempt to motivate their staff through target-setting, close supervision, reward (usually money) and blaming them when things go wrong.

Theory Y employees on the other hand are motivated by the work itself and derive satisfaction from doing a good job (intrinsic motivation). Managers who have this understanding of their staff are likely to motivate by giving more challenging work, creating a climate of trust and giving recognition of a job well done.

The parallel with Maslow is striking. Theory X is similar to those motivated by the lower of Maslow's hierarchies and Theory Y assumes that staff are motivated by the higher levels.

1.3.2 Herzberg

In 1959 Frederick Herzberg proposed that there were factors in the workplace that created employee satisfaction and factors which created dissatisfaction. These he labelled "motivators" and "hygiene factors". The key point is that hygiene factors only create dissatisfaction, not satisfaction and do not in themselves motivate, whilst motivators need to be in place to positively motivate staff.

So hygiene factors include things such as working conditions, relationships with the boss and with colleagues, security and salary. Money here is not a motivator, but a perceived lack or underpayment is demotivating.

Motivators include things such as the work itself, achievement, recognition, advancement and growth.

Again it is striking how these echo the Maslow approach – the lower order needs cease to be relevant when they are met and are not motivators, whilst esteem and self-actualisation are motivating.

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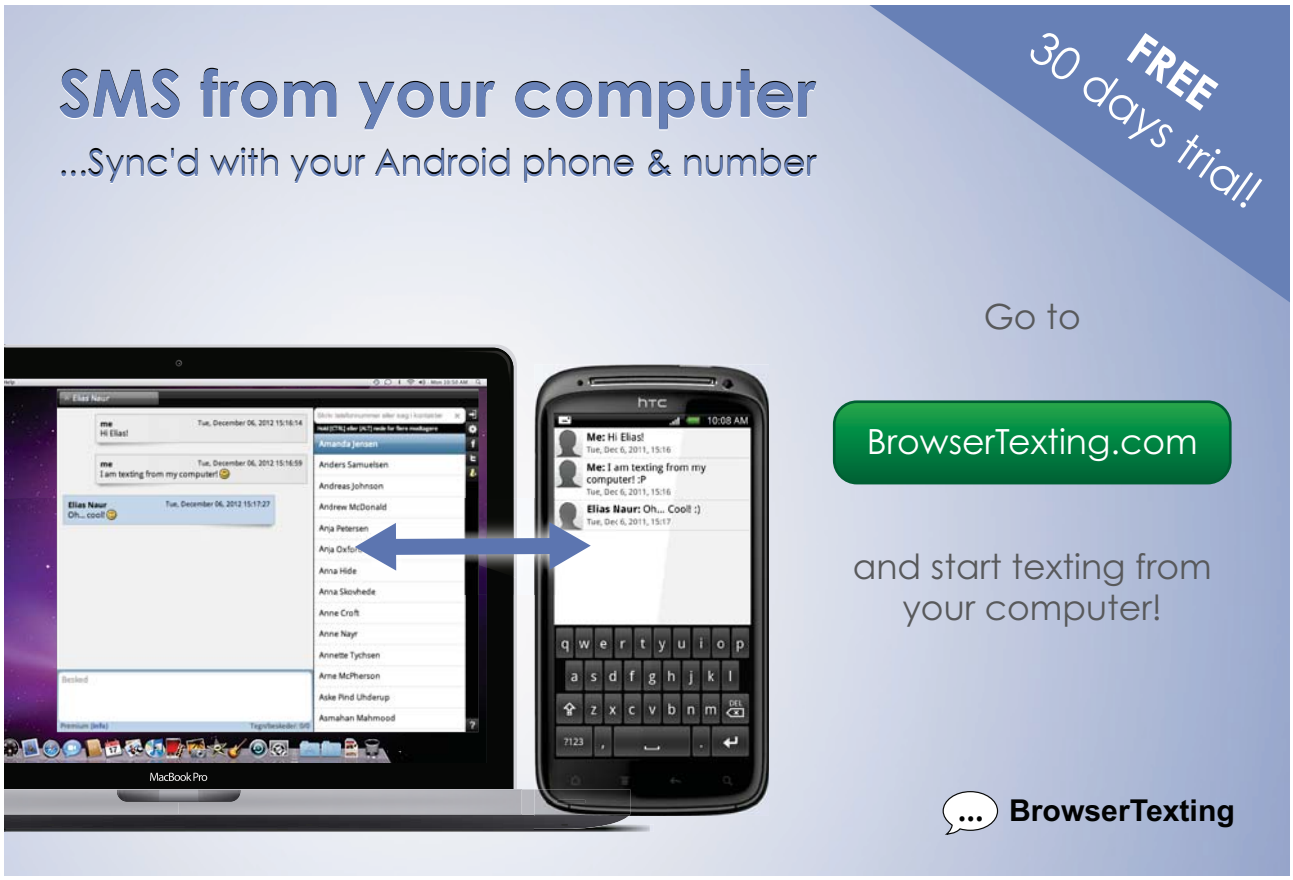
1.4 Conclusion

Deep within our DNA there is an altruistic drive to support the group which demonstrates how important relating to others is. What motivates us as individuals starts with the basic needs such as food and shelter. After that our main motivating factors are relating to others, being ourselves and developing to fulfil our potential.

Finding and understanding yourself is not simply an interesting pastime for the few, it is an intrinsic need in all of us.

However we are not all at the same stage of this development and there does seem to be a journey through different levels of needs and development that we tend to travel through. We will now examine some of the main priorities in the typical stages of life.



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2 What motivates us

Different things motivate different people. In this chapter we will explore what can motivate us as individuals and we will start by examining the priorities of different life stages which heavily can influence each of us.

2.1 Motivation at different life stages

2.1.1 Hope

Our life in the outside world starts, of course, when we are born – a rude awakening from the warmth, comfort and security of the womb to the harsh clinical realities of a hospital room. Babies are utterly helpless and need to be looked after, needing food, comfort, warmth and all the other things we have already covered at the lower end of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The baby depends upon mother and father for everything and – at least in a loving and caring family – all those needs are met, food, warmth and love.

At some stage however the baby, perhaps around 18 months, when he or she begins to become aware that they are separate individuals from their parents, begins to realise that they need the care of these adults and without them they cannot survive. There is a battle between wanting to develop their independence whilst also being anxious not to jeopardise the relationship as they need to ensure their safety continues. The original unconditional love for the baby begins to have conditions attached around their behaviour.

2.1.2 Exploration

The priorities as a child are to learn and explore and to develop increasing independence, testing it out whilst always ensuring that the parents are still there and supportive. Some of the things that the child learns are how to behave, what to believe and what makes mum and dad happy and unhappy. The natural instincts slowly start to become modified to fit the acceptable parameters.

The desire to please, to become accepted by others, by modifying instinctive behaviour becomes set down in early life and dominates motivation for some time to come. In childhood years this may be about pleasing parents by being a "good boy" or "good girl", working hard in school and sticking to the rules.

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2.1.3 Uncertainty

Emerging as teenagers, there is a huge change physically and emotionally and an increasing need to feel independent and a desire to find an identity. The need for acceptance becomes more about acceptance by peers and friends, rather than parents. Yet there is a tension between acceptance by the group on the one hand and finding a separate identity on the other. It is striking what teenagers choose to wear and what music they listen to, there is some individuality in taste, but also a great deal of conformity. So clothes are usually jeans and a t-shirt with whatever variation the fashion industry is driving at the time and music taste is popular music rather than classical, jazz or anything else that is not mainstream.

2.1.4 Establishment

At the end of formal education, the 20s and 30s are dominated by establishing ourselves as independent from our parents and acquiring all that we need for adult life. This includes moving out of the family home if that's affordable, finding a way of earning a living, finding a partner to share life with, maybe locating to a new area and finding new friends. Having children is also a priority, although increasingly this is deferred so that people can establish themselves in their careers.

This involves ensuring that the employee is accepted now by colleagues and bosses, rather than just parents and friends. A new set of expectations arrive and a new level of conditioning is acquired, as the employee progresses at work, getting promotions and new jobs along the way. In our hectic pressurised society, the work part of our lives can dominate all others.

There comes a point where all the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy are basically sorted. Consider the family with two young children, where both parents work, living in their own home with cars, holidays and all that goes with an affluent middle class Western lifestyle.

2.1.5 Broadening

The next stage is when all these initial goals and needs have been fulfilled – the career, the house, the spouse, the kids – all acquired. At some point in mid-life there may be a change in outlook, perhaps triggered by a significant birthday, a questioning about the job or career, a relationship breakdown or redundancy for example. All of these could trigger deep reflection, a broadening of outlook and a desire for more meaning or maybe a new direction. It is what is often described as a "mid-life crisis", although it does not need to be a crisis or a single event.

2.1.6 Reflection

The next life stage is older age, probably linked to retirement. The priorities of life may change again and usually work plays less of a part, a new purpose and meaning may be needed.

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Our motivations and priorities change as we go through different life stages, but the one constant thing is change and an impetus for personal development. Two key things remain constant, the need to relate to others and the desire for meaning and individuation.

As Jung says:

> *"A human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species.*
>
> *The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning.*
>
> *The significance of the morning undoubtedly lies in the development of the individual, our entrenchment in the outer world, the propagation of our kind, and the care of our children.*
>
> *This is the obvious purpose of nature.*
>
> *But when this purpose has been attained – and more than attained – shall the earning of money, the extension of conquests, and the expansion of life go steadily on beyond the bounds of all reason and sense?*

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Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning, or the natural aim, must pay for it with damage to his soul, just as surely as a growing youth who tries to carry over his childish egoism into adult life must pay for this mistake with social failure."

The Stages of Life, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche.

2.2 Motivation for individuals

2.2.1 Nature vs nurture

It is perhaps worth exploring here the perennial question about what shapes us as individuals – is it our nature that we are born with that dominates our future path, or is it nurture – the way that we are brought up and the influences on and around us during that time? Of course the truth is that it is a blend of both.

A natural talent and creative flair for music, if not developed, does not automatically lead to a musical genius like Mozart. He is regarded as a child prodigy, a naturally gifted musician. A natural born genius. Well, yes and no. He wrote incredible pieces of music at an astonishingly young age, so it is reasonable to assume it was in his nature somehow. The reality is though that he lived and breathed music under the immense pressure from his father and wrote very many pieces of music so that by the time some of it was pretty good he was still young. From the outside it looks as though he is a genius, if you saw the reality you may conclude it was sheer hard work and dedication.

What is true though, is that without the "encouragement" (or pressure) from his father he would not have accomplished the things that he did.

In this example the nature and nurture were clearly working together to produce music of extraordinary quality at a young age. Most nurturing is not however done in such a concentrated, focussed and consistent way. Most nurturing – or conditioning as we might call it is much more subtle as we will now discover.

2.2.2 The desire for acceptance

As we have already seen, the main thing that motivates the vast majority, if not all of us, is to be loved and accepted and to know that we are good enough.

This desire for acceptance creates in us a sort of rule-book of beliefs and values, a sense of right and wrong, what is acceptable and what is not. They could be helpful beliefs or unhelpful beliefs, true of false.

They have been inherited from parents, family, friends, colleagues and society at large. Indeed much of it is neither deliberately, or even consciously taught to us, but is received by osmosis. Long held beliefs and 'common sense' approaches are talked about in an unquestioned way and adopted as fact by the individual growing up.

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Even as adults we are bombarded with messages and our desire to be individual conflicts with our desire to be accepted. Usually the desire for acceptance wins. The simple reason for this is that the only way that society can operate, i.e. with lots of individuals living together in peace, is if everyone plays to a set of rules. This means sacrificing some individuality in order to gain the security that comes with living together in community.

So stealing is outlawed even if you are very hungry and are standing next to some fruit on display at a shop. The immediate desire to eat needs to be controlled until food can be obtained in a way that fits the rules of society – for example buying the apple first rather than just picking it up and eating it. Or deferring gratification until you can get home to the fridge. This example is a simple one as stealing is prohibited explicitly by law. However most social rules are not in law, instead they are contained in an unwritten social code which needs to be discovered throughout life.

An example of this would be that parents and society expects people in their twenties to be getting a job and establishing themselves in a career. For the individual, the desire to get a well-paid job may outweigh the desire to express their individuality and so a career that does not really fit the individual is chosen. This may be one that is socially acceptable to friends and/or to meet parental expectations.

This is the sort of point at which we can start to lose ourselves and set the nagging feeling going that "this isn't really me". Decisions such as this can have long-lasting effects for the individual.

There are a myriad of things that you may have adopted as a world view, beliefs about what is good and acceptable. However these fit other people's ideas of what is right and appropriate – and not necessarily yours. You have to test these for yourself and decide whether they are relevant to your life today. Inevitably some of the rules that your parents learnt came from their parents – if those attitudes have not been updated to suit the needs of today's world then you're operating with an out of date manual of how things should be.

The powerful desire for acceptance, established from the day we were born, leads us to adapt ourselves – our true selves – in order to be accepted by those around us. Understanding this is key for the journey back to finding yourself and understanding yourself.

2.2.3 Responding to change

Life in today's society is very different from life even a few decades ago. The pace of global change is remarkable – the growth of populations, the development of technology, the global nature of trade and commerce.

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Consider the start of the 20th Century. Britain was running an empire that spanned the globe. Within a few decades and after two world wars the USA was the new superpower and Britain was in decline. The rise of communism gave hope of a new way of living, which soon gave way when the cracks started to appear and populations revolted against their oppressive communist regimes. The rise of Japan as a leading economy was soon followed by other economies developing in Asia. At the start of the 21st century we are witnessing the rise of China and India as enormous countries with fast developing economies. The USA is no longer without rivals and the formerly powerful European nations are joining together to form a block to retain influence on this new larger scale.

All this happened in the span of one lifetime – and some people have lived through all of that change.

Attitudes and outlooks from one generation need to be tested by the next rather than unthinkingly being assimilated. I am sure you can call to mind examples where someone older has made assumptions about the way the world is which are no longer true, maybe because technology has changed or society's attitudes have changed with the next generation.

2.3 Conclusion

At different stages in our life we are motivated by different things – what pre-occupies us in the morning of life fades away in the afternoon. Without nurture our natural talents may lie dormant. Without an internal sense of acceptance we can continue to compromise ourselves to please others and not be true to ourselves.

The world is constantly changing and without understanding yourself you may struggle to thrive – or even survive – in the changing environment. Finding and understanding ourselves enables us to let go of outdated notions and respond to the changing world as it really is – but this is very difficult to do if these beliefs form an integral part of our identity as we shall see in the next chapter.

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3 Who we think we are

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts."
William Shakespeare, As You Like It.

3.1 Our roles

We all have roles to play in our lives and these change as we move through it. In the last chapter we considered the different lifestages that we can go through and as well as each having their own priorities they may also demand us to play new roles.

We all start as a son or daughter, maybe then add to that the role of sister or brother, then friend, pupil, team-mate, student, girlfriend or boyfriend, candidate, employee, colleague, partner, husband or wife, manager, father or mother, aunt or uncle, godparent, grandparent…the list goes on!

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Just reading that list may have conjured up some images in your mind of what each of those means to you. You will have some kind of perception of each of them, how to behave or not to behave in that role. Relaxing with old school friends over a few drinks will suggest a different way to behave than if you were with your boss or your young niece or nephew.

A role, according to the dictionary, is what you are expected to do, or your function. As the Shakespeare quote above suggests, all the players have their assigned role with prescribed directions which are set out in a script. The actions they take are the ones that the other players expect them to take, they have to stay in role in order to relate to the other players who are also in role. And over time each person will have many roles or parts to play.

Consider a typical week of a father who works. He wakes up as the husband next to his wife, he gets up and wakes up his children in the role of father. He has breakfast as father and husband and then walks to the station or his car and performs the role of commuter.

An hour later, he is performing the role of employee, or manager, or engineer, or accountant, or whatever. In the evening he again practises his role as a commuter and during the journey gets out of his role as employee, just in time to return home as father and husband.

The weekend will usually be much more father and husband and less employee. Meeting up with the wider family for Sunday lunch for example will put him into a different set of roles, perhaps uncle or nephew – or son once again.

Playing roles is necessary in order for society to operate smoothly – everyone has "their exits and their entrances". The role is about one's function in that relationship and having it defined within a broad area of agreement provides some security for each person entering into that relationship. A feeling of certainty as to what to expect. An unspoken but yet agreed way of operating which enables the interaction between the parties to be more efficient and skip many of the steps otherwise needed to build up a relationship.

3.2 Role conflict

One of the challenges with having multiple roles is that there is no reason why these should all be compatible. Indeed it is unlikely that they will all be. For example to succeed in the role of mother you need to spend quality time with your children. Yet to succeed in the role of employee you need to be at work, showing commitment to that role too. It is possible that a tension can arise between doing both to the level that the individual may wish. It can leave a parent feeling guilty for not being there for their children or maybe to a rushed and stressful time at work so that they can go and collect the children on time. There are many combinations of roles that may result in conflicting demands that are difficult to meet.

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If we are constantly playing roles, we are always doing what we are expected to do – whether that is what others expect of us, or what we expect of ourselves, according to the label on the role that we are playing at that time. By definition these roles cannot be the true us.

So if you were to spend your life playing roles, as most of us do, when do we get the opportunity to be ourselves? When does the actor get to put aside the script, take off all the grease paint and be themselves?

3.3 Our identity

It is very easy when juggling multiple roles, or intensely living one role for a time, for these roles to become our identity. We identify with a role so much that it feels like it is us.

If the actor never gets to take of the grease paint then he will inevitably lose touch with himself and identify more and more with the role.

Roles require us to be only a part of ourselves and they may require us to be something that we are not. The more we do things, the more they become a habit and the more that we think in the same way, the more these patterns of thought and behaviour become our identity.

The roles that we play can give us strength and self-confidence. For example if you play a technical or professional role at work, you may find that you derive a great deal of satisfaction from that role. People come to you for advice and guidance, they listen to what you say, you're the expert, you are needed. Your feelings about yourself, your self-confidence can come from that role and not from yourself.

When our identity is derived from these external roles, our true identity gets forgotten and we believe the lie that we are our roles.

If we get used to wearing a mask of one type or another, interacting in a safe, predictable way with others, we can feel secure and more certain about our life. The more that we depend on the masks and the safer that we feel as a result of wearing them, the greater the risk and uncertainty we feel of taking off our mask and interacting openly, honestly and authentically.

3.4 Feeling lost

When we identify with an external role, our identity is taken out of our hands. Our identity exists only as long as the role exists. So if it is a job role for example, an unexpected redundancy comes as a huge shock. It is not just the practical difficulty of finding a new job, it is a loss of a sense of self, a loss of a range of comforting feelings such as self-confidence, purpose and status.

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This sense of feeling lost can occur with the end of a variety of roles – when children leave home, a relationship break-up or divorce, a redundancy or retirement. All of these can feel like a loss of identity when the roles made up such a large part of life and of our identity.

3.5 Personality and ego

What we describe as our personality is probably taken as a given by most of us, it is what – or who – we think we are. Psychologists have described it as the Ego (meaning "I") – it is our sense of self. However the more one tries to examine what personality really is, the more it seems to elude us. For example you can hear the confusion in people's language – "she has a nice personality" – which must mean that she and the personality are different. However if the personality is our sense of identity, but is not us, then who are we?

Our personality is partly nature and partly nurture, it is partly a given from our DNA and partly developed from our experience of the world, which starts as early as the fourth month of our existence whilst still in the womb. The part of our personality that evolves during our life does so because it is of use to us. The brain comes with little or no hard-wired templates about how things should be and so it has to learn through experience, through relationships with those around us and from the feedback we receive.

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Our personality can then become a given or continue to evolve. It seems reasonable to assume that once we have been in contact with most of the situations that we will experience in life, that we have got a reliable rule-book to follow. It worked last time and so it should work this time. For example I related successfully to my parents – my early authority figures – in this way and so I will relate to all authority figures in this way. However the authority figures, such as an employer or policeman may not respond like the parents did – there is no reason why they should – and so the rulebook either needs to be updated or life become stressful, puzzling and potentially self-destructive.

Our personality is like a piece of armour which is at the same time our greatest shield and also potentially our greatest prison. It enables us to deal with the outside world, but it can also insulate us from it – and from other people.

The process of increasing our personal awareness helps us to see our personality for what it is and to enable us to choose to update the rule book.

3.6 Internal identity

Practically speaking we have to play roles to operate effectively in society, but these can dominate our sense of identity and we can end up feeling lost when they end.

The solution is to find a way of playing the roles without them becoming our identity. We need to find an internal source for our identity, not an external one. When we have found an internal source for our identity we can pick up roles and play them with confidence, knowing that they are not us, just a role we play and that when we step out of role we come home back to ourselves, we do not feel lost.

Getting back in touch with who and what you really are – finding yourself – opens up the possibility to play roles and move in and out of them with freedom when you like.

3.7 Conclusion

We all perform roles in life, yet we are not our roles and if we identify too closely with them we may feel safe – but only temporarily. We are also not our personality, which has in large part been forged as a result of the experiences of surviving and protecting ourselves in the real world.

Getting back in touch with who you really are is about becoming aware of the rules in the rule book that you have acquired during your life – and identifying the ones that do not fit the real you. This journey has to start with self-awareness, which we will look at in the next chapter.

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4 Who we really are

4.1 The authentic self

When we explored the concept of personality we could see that it started off with our innate programming from our DNA and was then modified mainly over a couple of decades by various outside influences to create what we regard as our personality. This is in many ways a "false self", a self which is created to please others, to fit in with their agenda, to enable relationship with those around us. With the best will in the world it is unlikely that you will turn out as an adult with no unhelpful of unintended modifications – or what we call "conditioning".

The authentic self is the real you beneath all the conditioning that you have acquired during your lifetime. The true you is the one that finds life fulfilling in a deep sense rather than theoretically good on a purely intellectual level. For example on an intellectual level life is good because you have the career, the partner, the house and the car – but inside you feel lost. It is the real you that feels lost, whilst it is the learned you, the ego, the intellectual evaluation that is satisfied that the "shoulds" have been fulfilled.

Your authentic self is the one that longs to be able to express itself – and critically – is the one with the untapped potential, the uniqueness that other people will recognise as charisma and authenticity. It is the you that can transform your life and the lives of those around you, by being in touch with that which you truly are.

4.2 Self-awareness

Self awareness is often cited as being a key to personal development – and potentially it is, depending upon your definition! The personality is not you, you *have* a personality, so if you want your "self" to be aware of itself, you will have a long wait! The self, as the personality, cannot be *self aware*. However, you, as an independent observer of your own internal processes, can become aware of what your personality is up to, how it is behaving and the impact on yourself and others. A state of pure awareness enables you to step outside yourself as it were, and to look at yourself from the outside, as an independent observer – much like a coach does in a coaching relationship. In a coaching relationship the coach gives an external perspective on you, in a supportive way and invites you to take that external perspective on yourself as well.

When you are outside the system of your self, then you can be objective about it. When you are wrapped up in the self – the either/or dilemmas of what you should do and what you should not do, of what you must do and you must not do dominate your internal processes – the self shuttles between the extremes, it is in the system, not able to observer itself – indeed it *is* the system.

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Personal awareness is gained by this shift in perspective – of observing your actions, thoughts and feelings, observing the world around you, the people and the relationships and giving yourself a break from your self. It is only from observing what is really going on that you can hope to change and adapt to the circumstances you find yourself in.

4.2.1 Feedback

Feedback is also a well-used term in coaching and management. Managers are often exhorted to give their team feedback, not just criticism. Managers are sometimes taught to give a "feedback sandwich" – find two positive things to say to someone and use those as the bread of the sandwich and then deliver your killer blow – the criticism – as the meat in the sandwich. Almost inevitably it becomes clear in the delivery that the real intention is to give criticism. It is not difficult to detect the difference between a lukewarm complement and a heartfelt criticism!

Feedback is essential for any of us to get to the truth – to hear what it is like to see ourselves from the outside. Otherwise we live in a fantasy world of our own making – although we may be quite attached to our own familiar, comforting stories about ourelves.

The most useful form of feedback is the one that is most readily accepted. The one that is most readily accepted is objective and not value laden – i.e. it is factual feedback, not charged with emotion and delivered with the intent to raise awareness.

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Another aspect is that it is delivered between two individuals of equal standing in the relationship, rather than from one expert or person in authority talking down to the receiver of the feedback. Inevitably the feedback has more weight if it comes from someone whose approval is sought (remember the way of relating to our parents in the past in order to seek approval may spill over into the here and now) and so the way feedback is delivered can have greater impact than intended. It also does little to build the relationship as it reinforces the superiority of one person over the other. In a coaching relationship this more equal relationship can be achieved by entering into the feedback as a joint process of enquiry, in which each party is exploring in a non-judgemental way.

This logically leads to the realisation that the best bit of feedback, the one that we most readily accept, is the one we realise for ourselves. As Fritz Perls said "Truth can be tolerated only if you discover it yourself because then, the pride of discovery makes the truth palatable."

So how to apply this in a management relationship which by definition is not equal? The answer is to facilitate not tell. To facilitate the exploration by the member of the team of the behaviour from a new perspective – and to discover it for themselves, simply because they are now looking at themselves from the outside in. They are perfectly capable of seeing themselves as others do if they accept the invitation to adopt that perspective. Through doing so the manager practises his coaching skills, develops a new dimension to the relationship, builds trust and ultimately a more effective, self-aware and ultimately engaged employee.

One advanced level of feedback is more like a commentary – a commentary on what is going on – both in front of you – and inside you. It also creates the possibility of giving feedback that is non-judgemental, by taking responsibility for your own internal processes.

For example we often hear things like "she made me angry when she did that" – what this tells us is that it is all about her – there is no acknowledgement that the anger came from their own internal process. Ultimately it did not come from "her". The statement is quite simply untrue. The correct statement would be something like "when she did that I felt angry" – this is both more neutral and factual, that is exactly what happened. One thing followed another, but it was not her fault. Indeed the revised statement draws a certain curiosity about the person making the statement that when she did this I felt angry – isn't that interesting? What's that about? The process of simply making a statement like a running commentary in effect gives the speaker feedback on themselves, in a neutral way.

Feedback done well enables you to build up the quality of your relationships, to facilitate the development of those to whom you relate and most of all to expand your own choices about how to respond and your own personal development.

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4.2.2 Decoding language

Some feedback you can easily begin to give yourself is through monitoring your language. The personality is full of out-dated rules and assumptions and the process of becoming aware of these increases personal choice. Those rules can be detected in our language as they are inadvertently sent out into the world.

Take this well known saying: "Children should be seen and not heard" – we can recognise that this comes from a more Victorian age where clearly there is a set of expectations about how children should behave and how they are placed in the pecking order of society. It may stand out today as a laden with assumptions, but was just the way things were in days gone by.

Likewise today there are many phrases that either explicitly or implicitly communicate what you should do – it is just that they are so familiar to us that we do not recognise the assumptions hidden in the language. Take the phrase "freedom of the press" – there is an implicit assumption that "the press *should* be free" and that this is a good thing. In the UK for example there are several aspects where the freedom of the press becomes an intrusion into another's private life. And there is another assumption – that part of your life *should* be private.

Whether implicit or explicit the assumptions are woven into our everyday life in such a way that we do not notice them. To an outsider, like us looking in on the Victorians over 100 years ago, the assumptions jump out as being different.

Learning to pay attention to the words that people use and the assumptions beneath those words will open up to you a whole new realm of meaning and communication. The words should, ought must, need – and even want – point towards some attitudes and assumptions that were probably fixed in the past and may be outside the speaker's awareness. When we are the speaker we can also pay attention to our own words, listening for the hidden assumptions that may need re-examining.

Language also has some built-in limitations. Many words form either/or pairings, which reflect our thinking process – so things are either good or bad, right or wrong, dark or light. The darkness can only be recognised in relation to lightness. The words get their true meaning from being other than their opposites. Our use of these words sheds some light on the thought processes that created them.

Most people have been conditioned through life and are unaware of that conditioning. The language carries clues that you can pick up on and get a glimpse of the conditioning. Likewise as you listen to yourself – or as you get feedback from others – you become aware of your own conditioning. We have learnt to become unaware of our conditioning and we can learn to become aware also. With awareness comes freedom.

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There are four basis mechanisms through which our hidden and often negative conditioning finds its way into language.

1. *Projection*

This occurs where something that we think or feel ourselves is put out into the world, rather than recognising our own part in the drama. It can be detected in phrases that use words like "they". For example when talking about "fatcat bosses" a phrase such as "they are all selfish and greedy" may be used. This is clearly not true. There is a projection onto "them" by the speaker and this is clear from the language. Quite possibly the negative past experience of the speaker of figures in authority or those seen as successful, is projected out into the world and focussed on this particular group of people.

A step in the right direction would be to take ownership of this fixed attitude. A more correct statement would therefore be "I think that all "fatcat bosses" are selfish and greedy". This is a statement which accurately communicates the thought that the speaker is having. It also allows for empirical testing and modification by experience, in a way that "they are all selfish and greedy" cleverly closes down. It is stated as a fact that cannot easily be challenged.

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So in language projection tends to make use of the words "you", "it" and "they" when what is really meant is "I". One way for you to become a more responsible user of this incredible tool that is unique to humans is to take responsibility for what you say and your own internal processes. Become aware of what you say in relation to "them" and see if you can rephrase your statement to take ownership of your attitude, by saying "I".

2. *Introjection*

A second mechanism is introjection. This is where an attitude from someone significant has been internalised. It is like a rule that has been imported into the furthest recesses of a person's mind, outside of their awareness and points out when they fail to live up to the ideal. "I really shouldn't have another drink", "I should lose weight" and "I should work harder" are all indicators of a potential introjection. Someone significant to the speaker has probably in the past communicated one way or another that drinking is bad, that only a certain size or weight is acceptable (well most of the media, advertising, entertainment and fashion industries communicate this to us 24/7) or that hard work is an important way to measure your worth and so to be acceptable and accepted. Introjections are usually the safest thing to believe or accept about the world in order to be accepted by the group – maybe it is a tradition, or it is fashionable.

Another way of thinking about this concept is "incorporation" – incorporating a part of someone else's attitudes, beliefs or behaviours into our own by internalising their outlook. It is like we have "swallowed whole" the attitude of another without evaluating, testing and accepting it for ourselves. As a consequence it can be heard in the language of shoulds, oughts, musts and "supposed to's". Other words like "always" and "never" also hint at an introjection, hard and fast rules incorporated uncritically from the outside and residing out of our awareness.

Introjections are also quite tricky to overcome. Consider this – the attitude, value or belief that has been introjected – swallowed whole in a trusting way – may well have come from someone whose love and attention was sought, from someone respected, trusted and loved. The act of critically appraising that introjected belief and rejecting it can feel like a high risk option, creating anxious feelings, because in rejecting the belief, you are, in effect, rejecting the person who originated it in the first place. In short rejecting a belief in adulthood that came from a much loved parent may feel as though it is the parent that is being rejected and yet it is their acceptance that we originally craved.

Another way to think of introjection is as conditioning. The collection of introjects is how we have been conditioned to think and behave over our lifetime by a wide variety of influences, from our family to wider society. Becoming aware of – and unlearning – our conditioning is an essential step in rediscovering our true authentic selves.

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In language an introjection can mean that the word "I" is used when what is really meant is "they" – "I believe it's good to work hard", when it's really "they believe it's good to work hard".

It is often said that a projection is the opposite of an introjection as a projection is taking something internal and pushing it out into the world, making the external world responsible for it, whilst an introjection is taking something that was out in the external environment and making it part of your inner world, taking responsibility for something that lies outside of yourself.

3. *Retroflection*

Retroflection appears in language as a split within the person. The person is both the subject and the object in a sentence – which shows that there is an internal division or internal battle going on.

In language this would be something like "I don't know what to do with myself" or "I am ashamed of myself" or "I tell myself not to" – "myself" is a key word that occurs in retroflection.

What is going on here is that action that is meant for the external world is sharply turned back to the internal world, back on yourself. For example it may be dangerous to express anger, so it is bottled up inside, turned back inwards. That energy finds a way to express itself which it probably does through bodily tension and tight muscles – another clue that may be apparent when in conversation.

Retroflection means that there is an internal fight – clearly evident in the words used – and it is between a more powerful and less powerful part – the more powerful part "I", suppressing the less powerful part "myself" which must be kept hidden from the outside world (and quite possibly out of conscious awareness too).

4. *Confluence*

Confluence arises when an individual has not developed a strong sense of personal identity and chooses to follow the crowd in the hope of being accepted by them. Without strongly held views of their own the individual takes on the attitudes of the majority.

This comes out in language by the use of "we" – making statements on behalf of the group, rather than speaking for themselves. The unfortunate result generally is that the individual in confluence does not get the recognition and acceptance they seek – instead the lack of personal identity means that others cannot easily relate to them, leading to a sense of isolation, the exact opposite of what they sought.

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An example of confluence is a phenomenon known as "groupthink" – where "we" as a group adopt a certain understanding or way of thinking which becomes set in stone. There is no-one to put an alternative point of view – and if someone does come in from outside to give a different perspective, they are likely to be ignored as "they don't understand us" or "they have strange ideas". In short the desire to hold the group together is stronger than the desire to operate effectively and consider the real situation openly.

A certain level of confluence can be useful at times – it is what we might describe as empathy in certain contexts – it has its place, it is just not a useful position to be in permanently.

4.3 Self-understanding

With increased self-awareness comes increased self-knowledge. As you become able to spot the clues in the language that you use, you will become aware of your habitual patterns and your internal conflicts.

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We discussed introjects in language and how to spot them. Now we can consider their impact on us and the need to understand them. If in the past we have swallowed whole a set of values, beliefs and attitudes that came pre-packaged and unquestioned from the outside – from whatever source – it is highly unlikely that all of these introjects are compatible with each other. It is highly likely that they are:

- in conflict with each other, and
- in conflict with our true selves, our natural, innate, intuitive outlook, and
- leading to us actively suppressing some parts of ourselves that the introject says is unacceptable.

Becoming aware of our introjects, what we can call our conditioning, gives us the opportunity to regurgitate beliefs that we swallowed whole and digest them afresh – this time not as unquestioning children, but as experienced adults. Instead of accepting them, we modify and assimilate them – they are no longer a foreign body creating conflict, but absorbed to form part of the coherent whole.

Becoming aware of and understanding our introjects and how they operate allows us to change them. It is not necessary to understand where they came from or why they are there, although that may become apparent, it is simply a matter of examining them as an adult in the here and now and taking from them what will be useful for the future.

This self-knowledge leads to self-understanding – and this gives us choice and freedom. In each moment we are free to choose how to react to the real presenting world in front of us, rather than to yesterday's world acting out pre-programmed fixed attitudes. It offers up the possibility to live spontaneously, in the moment, creatively applying your accumulated wisdom to the situation before you, free of internal conflict and half-measures.

4.4 Self-acceptance

Becoming aware of your own internal processes and in turn gaining knowledge and understanding naturally leads on to self-acceptance.

As you become aware of your fixed attitudes, beliefs and values that may no longer be useful to you and you begin to understand that there were good reasons for you to have adopted them, you can begin to see that it is neither good nor bad that this is the way life is – and the way that you are – it is just a natural consequence of living the human experience.

Instead of wishing that you were different, you can change not by rejecting parts of yourself that you do not like – which is what leads to these different phenomena of projection, retroflection and so on – but by accepting all of yourself. Accepting yourself leads to increased self-awareness as there is no need to hide parts of yourself as acceptance is pretty much the opposite of being judgemental. The hidden parts can come out into awareness and receive warmth, compassion and acceptance, rather than judgement, persecution and rejection.

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The amazing thing is that the route to personal change and development is not rejecting the parts of us that we have been taught not to like or trying to modify or suppress them. Instead it is in accepting them that we can then move on and develop.

As Carl Rogers said – "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."

4.5 Conclusion

Who we really are is not who we thought we were or felt we should be. The authentic self is the true self underneath all the conditioning that has been acquired through life's experiences. We are what we are and that is OK – after all who can tell us otherwise?

We can get back in touch with ourselves by increasing our levels of personal awareness. We can do this by receiving feedback from others and even by listening to our own language. Our language has the potential to give us clues about our conditioning. From there we can re-evaluate our rule book and look at our true selves with compassion, acceptance – and excitement about our potential and the possibilities.

Being in touch with our true selves is about getting real, not living in a fantasy of who we could or should be, but living with what is. Like any situation that needs evaluating or changing, the only way to do so is to first accept how it really is and to start from there. Knowing ourselves fully is no different – it is a pre-requisite for real lasting change and for a satisfied contentment with life.

Ultimately being in touch with your authentic self means that:

- you will have high levels of self awareness. There will be few parts of yourself of which you are unaware and so you are less likely to project onto others.
- you will accept yourself for who you are. There will be no need to look for acceptance outside yourself and so internalise other peoples' rules. Old introjects have come into awareness and been re-evaluated. Then they have been discarded, unlearned, or modified and assimilated appropriately for today's world.
- you will have a strong sense of your own identity. There will be no need to modify yourself to be accepted by the group. You will retain your sense of self in a group rather than experiencing confluence.
- you will be aware of and able to express your true feelings in an appropriate way as a responsible adult. There will be no need to be divided against yourself – with high levels of knowledge and awareness you quickly become aware of internal divisions and can work through the dialogue to a resolution, rather than being stuck in retroflection.

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Part 2 – Relating to others

In Part 1 we explored what it means to understand ourselves and concluded that self-acceptance is the key to personal growth and development.

Self-acceptance changes the way we look at ourselves – to see ourselves as we really are. When relating to others, exercising this same attitude of acceptance can transform our interpersonal dialogues and take our relationships to a new level.

Many people feel vulnerable and so have their personality shields up to protect themselves. Showing that you accept others without judgement allows them to dare to lower their shield and opens up the possibility for a real and meaningful contact between two people.

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5 How we see each other

5.1 Prejudice

When we meet people for the first time we draw conclusions quickly about them. As a survival mechanism this has served humanity well – are they friend or foe? In most circumstances, although there is no such risk attached to the judgement we make, we still jump to conclusions. It is typical for us to make assumptions about others when we only know a little bit of information about them – this is pre-judging what they will be like – and this is where our prejudices come into play.

It is very common when introduced to someone new to ask what they do – "I'm a mother of two" or "I'm in sales" or "I'm an investment banker" may give rise to a range of different pre-judgements about what they may be like. This is based on assumptions and a pre-set list of qualities – either positive or negative – that are associated with that particular group. This list of assumptions mean that a decision is made (a pre-judgement) based on the group to which they belong before the facts are known about this individual. It is clear that much discrimination is built on prejudice – pre-judging someone due to their race or gender for example. Getting to know the individual means that the assumptions are replaced by facts and personal experience.

Becoming aware of when you pre-judge someone, based on some kind of generalisation due to the group they belong to, presents the possibility of being able to move beyond that to seeing others more clearly.

For example someone goes to a dinner party hosted by a husband and wife. It's unclear who cooked the food and instead of asking the hosts, the guest compliments the wife on her cooking and is surprised to learn that the husband cooked it. This simple example shows how a pre-judgement about a situation leads to an incorrect assessment of a situation and reveals a prejudice about the roles of men and women in the home.

Another example of prejudice at work is in the workplace. When a Chief Executive – or your boss – walks into a room it's pretty clear that many will pre-judge the person and be very aware of the role. Indeed it is the role they may see and respond to rather than the person, conscious of the power of that role and how they could personally be affected. So the whispering stops, everyone looks busy, they are a bit more guarded about what they say and so on.

To go back to our theatre analogy, when the role of boss enters the stage, the staff members follow the pre-written script of how to respond to a boss, pre-judging how this boss is.

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The boss may be totally unaware that this is what is going on! The boss may think that everyone is very well behaved and diligent. No matter how much they walk around to get a feel for how the team is doing, they are always changing the environment because of how people are reacting to their role.

So roles and prejudices can be a hindrance for relating to others, but can also act as a re-assuring way of coping with uncertainty. As the new boss walks into the room, people are likely to respond in a guarded way, protecting themselves from the potentially negative effects of the role of boss. A more real relationship can only be built as the team members see past the role and past their prejudices to see the real person.

If you are a manager or leader in your workplace, you may need to think about how people react to you. Do they react to you only in your role? Is that helpful? How do you relate to your boss? Are you pre-judged and how do you pre-judge others?

It is perhaps fairly clear how most people will react to you in a certain role, the most common stereotypes or prejudices are likely to be playing in peoples' heads and this is useful to understand. You can either work with them and go with them, or choose to reveal more of yourself to change their perception by giving them more facts to replace their assumptions.

5.2 Projection

In the previous section we talked about projection and how language can give us clues when this is at work. Your own issues get projected out into the world and projected onto "them", like a movie is projected onto a screen. You see in others what you have created and projected, rather than what is actually there – although in reality you are seeing a mixture of the two.

Projection is potentially much more difficult to deal with than prejudice as it is generally out of the awareness of the person doing the projecting. So when the new boss walks into the room, as well as the realities of the role and the pre-judgements to contend with, there may also be projections going on. This is unique to each inter-personal relationship and the boss cannot make many assumptions about this. The boss may experience strange irrational responses from a member of staff due to the "unfinished business" playing out in their projections onto the boss. For example if a person had a previous experience of a critical authority figure (like a parent), that made them feel inadequate, then these feelings of inadequacy could get projected onto the boss. This in turn means that the member of staff does not react to what is really going on and what the boss really wants but to the old and out-dated projections of their own feelings of inadequacy. So the boss may feel that even though they have given some balanced positive and negative feedback, the member of staff just hears the negative feedback, reinforcing their own feelings of inadequacy, concluding that the boss thinks they are no good.

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So how to tackle this? All we can do is to take responsibility for our own actions and behaviours. We can become aware of our own projective processes and our own prejudices and in bringing them into our awareness we can re-evaluate the situation and understand our feelings about it.

Seeing others as they really are is not as easy as you might think!

5.3 Persona

The word "persona" originally meant a theatrical mask and they were used by Roman actors in theatres. When on the stage actors would play a role with a mask on to denote the character. During the performance they could change their mask and so play multiple characters. These personae could also have particular expressions painted onto them to express a particular emotion.

Carl Jung used the word persona to denote a social role – it is the social face that the individual chooses to present to the world – it is a carefully constructed mask to project the image that the individual wants. Indeed we may have several personae that are appropriate for different situations, just like the different characters in a play.

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Once Jack Nicholson, the Hollywood movie star, was asked why he often wore sunglasses. His response was that if he did not he was just another fat fifty year old guy, but with them on he was Jack Nicholson! You can almost imagine him coming to life as he puts them on. We would recognise him as Jack Nicholson without his trademark Wayfarer sunglasses, but with them he indicates that he feels he is more in tune with his public "bad boy" image. He is playing a role, projecting a persona.

This is common with many celebrities – the persona they project, although it is supposed to be themselves, actually is not, it is just another role that they play. This is of course a fairly unique kind of role to play – playing ourselves in the glare of the media spotlight – but how many of us are really playing ourselves, even with the much smaller spotlight shone by the people around us every day?

The most successful personalities have a range of these personae and are able to put on and take off these social masks with ease. Those with only one main mask may become trapped by this character and not have the repertoire needed to respond effectively in all the social situations in which they find themselves.

Do you have a persona, or several personae, that you construct and project out to others to establish a social self and protect the real you?

5.4 Conclusion

We tend to see each other through a wide range of lenses that each distort or colour what we are seeing. As a consequence we do not automatically see people as they really are – and crucially we may not even be aware that we are looking through these lenses as we are so used to them. There are particular types of lenses and we have looked at prejudice and projection.

Individuals also wear social masks to protect themselves. They play their roles so well and know the script by heart that they develop effective and convincing personae that mask the real person.

In the next chapter we will explore how these particularly operate in that uniquely human situation – the workplace.

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6 Relating to others at work

Many of us spend more time relating to our colleagues at work than we do relating to our family and friends. When these relationships are not working well and conflict arises this can feel very stressful.

Indeed research into what causes stress at work and what promotes employee engagement consistently points to relationships at work – and in particular with the direct line manager and the management team in general.

Issues such as poor management, not feeling listened to, not feeling supported and working in a climate of fear are consistently cited as problems.

6.1 Roles at work

In the previous section we talked about ourselves as playing different roles – and nowhere is this more tangible than in the workplace. When we join an organisation we are appointed to a role, we receive a role description (or job description) and it may include a person specification. It makes it quite clear and explicit that the role we are to play is not the person that we are.

We are primarily paid for the role we play – for what we do and not for who we are. A well-designed role goes through quite a detailed process of design to ensure that there is no overlap with others and that the limits and dimensions of roles and responsibilities are clear. Individual roles carry accountability for certain activities and all resources are allocated to a role to be managed or controlled.

This all comes together in a special diagram called an organisation chart – or organogram – that shows the nice straight lines and more complex dotted lines of relationships between roles. It's all very neat – and looks like an efficient system. For it to work like a system everyone needs to play their role well, preferably word-perfect every day, and relate to each other not as people but as the roles. This in theory means that people can be slotted in and out of those roles and replaced without a problem – like a spare part in a car, swap the new part for the old part.

Of course it does not work like this at all in practice. People are all different, they prefer to relate to each other as people, not as roles, they probably never learn their script, let alone be word-perfect and sometimes they choose to play other people's roles – or a new one altogether!

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All the same issues arise in the workplace as they do anywhere else. Projection and prejudice for example are constantly in play. So in larger organisations where people are grouped into departments or functions, they can develop their own cultures and ways of doing things – and may also attract different personality types. So for example the sales team might be driven and ambitious to make the sale and not focussed on process, whilst the finance or legal team are focussed on the correct procedures being followed. As a result it is easy to see an "us" and "them" situation arising (which is a form of confluence) where one group is prejudiced towards another and individuals may project their unfinished business onto people from the other group.

So statements like "finance are always preventing me from making the sale", "finance are nagging me for the paperwork again" or "the sales team never follow any procedures" are all easy to imagine.

If you want to truly relate to others successfully at work, to the individual people rather than the roles or the groups, then you need to take responsibility for your own internal processes and communication.

Becoming aware of things like your projections onto others, confluence with your own team, and prejudices about other groups will enable you to move past these to see the real person next to you rather than the role they play or the person they might represent from your past.

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As you do this and use your inter-personal skills that we discuss in the next chapter, you will become recognised as someone with their own approach and will stand out from the crowd as being a self-assured individual.

6.2 Management and leadership

Management and leadership are particular roles tasked with running the organisation. An organisation is simply a group of people relating together with a shared common purpose – fundamentally it is a social unit. It is not a machine and it does not exist as an entity in itself separate from those within it – it *is* those within it, and the way that they relate to each other and do things together (the culture).

Managers and leaders have a unique role to play in making this large disparate group of people with different backgrounds, education, technical abilities and perspectives come together to achieve a common aim. The problem is that most of these managers and leaders have never received any specific support to develop the competencies needed to do it effectively. They may have received some training on how to do some of the tasks of management so as to comply with the law and best practice, but this does not help with supporting a complex web of inter-personal relationships.

It is perhaps not surprising then that the workplace is not always a happy place!

Management and leadership roles are usually much more public and visible than others and also have power and influence over their colleagues. Relating to your boss – and your boss's boss is therefore quite different from relating to a peer – and probably feels as such.

It is certainly an undeniable fact that your boss has power and influence over you, they can, within set boundaries and rules, change your job, require you to work more, reduce your hours, change your salary, terminate your employment – or promote you. It is no wonder that these roles become centre stage – their role is to manage your role.

So given this fact, how can you relate to your boss and, if you are the boss, how can you relate to your staff? Two roles cannot relate to each other – ultimately the people need to. It is perfectly possible to see past the role to the person, to relate to the person, whilst respecting the role.

Indeed respecting the role works both ways, organisations need all the members of the team to play their part to make it operate effectively. Each person brings to their role a range of skills, experience and attitudes that another person would not and could not. A senior manager or business leader will recognise this, knowing that organisational success depends upon the complete range of technical abilities playing their full part.

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In an ideal world your boss will respect the strengths that you bring to your role, but that is not always the case. This may feel frustrating and unfair and it can be tempting to try and change their perspective, however you cannot reasonably expect to change other people – and trying to change your boss is probably unwise! The only thing that you can do is to take responsibility for how you are and how you behave.

You may have a set of internal processes going on that create voices that say things like "my boss should show me more respect" or "my boss is unfair". You may have some thoughts and feelings about your boss as you read this. In a previous section we talked about projection and introjection – those rules in our heads that represent fixed attitudes from the past. The more able you are to become aware of these out-dated rules, the more able you will be to see your boss as they really are and relate to them on that basis.

More than most other types of relationship at work, you may have two types of reaction going on, one to the person that you perceive and one to the role that they play – and what that role represents to you.

If you are the boss, then it will help you to understand that many people will find it difficult to relate to you openly and honestly because of what you represent to them, rather than who you are as a person. The only way to create a genuine inter-personal relationship is to provide the opportunities to build that key ingredient in any relationship – trust.

Building trust between staff and their managers and leaders is something that tends to happen by accident and seems to be shrouded in mystery. It is unclear to many what makes a good leader. Put simply a leader is someone who is followed by others willingly, and this will only happen if they trust them.

The phrase "earning their trust" is a useful one for a manager or leader to reflect on. Earning is strongly associated with working and building trust takes sustained work and effort. It is not just another task that leaders need to perform – it is arguably *the* task that leaders need to perform!

In subsequent sections we will look at how managers can adopt a coaching management style to build relationships with their team and how developing an authentic leadership style will enable leaders to generate trust.

6.3 Promotion

If you have just been promoted to your new management or leadership position then congratulations – you have now got a new role to play and a new script needs to be written for the part.

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An internal promotion means that there is a new dimension between yourself and your colleagues – those who used to be your peers are now your team. You will have to learn that the old ways of behaving with colleagues need to be modified. The reason is simple, with colleagues you could be relaxed and friendly because you were equals, when you are a boss you have power over them. You can tell them what to do, appraise their performance, influence their salary and ultimately recruit and dismiss people.

This transition can be a tricky one – not only will they see you differently, but you will see both them and yourself differently. A relaxed approach by a colleague can suddenly become a slack approach when viewed from the role of manager. This change in situation establishes a whole new dynamic to the relationship and gives plenty of opportunity for a whole new set of projections, introjects and confluence to arise!

Take confluence for example – you may have felt one of "us" before promotion – and now you are one of "them"! You may find yourself having to adjust which group you feel allegiance to. Your colleagues will probably be interested to see how you deal with that. Will you become "just like all the other bosses" or will you be different? Will they be able to have an easier life now that you're their boss, or will you change? Will promotion "go to your head"? All sorts of questions could be running through their minds.

The way to address this is of course to take responsibility for and become aware of your own internal processes and at the same time to establish new relationships with the team that recognises the fact that you have a new role. One way to build this sort of relationship is to develop a coaching management style.

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6.4 Developing a coaching management style

There are a range of different management styles. As we saw in Chapter 1, management theorists have tried to understand what motivates human beings at work and to tap into that for the benefit of the organisation. For example assuming that workers fit a "theory X" profile would lead to a management style that closely supervises staff and puts pressure on them to perform with the only reward being financial. A style that coerces, controls and directs.

A "theory Y" profile assumes that workers basically enjoy their work, that they are self-motivated and self-directed towards the end result. The assumption is that these workers want to perform well and progress, they will accept responsibility and value job satisfaction. An appropriate management style to adopt for this kind of worker is a coaching management style.

Adopting the wrong kind of style for theory Y workers would result in them experiencing a range of negative emotions, feeling demotivated, micro-managed, blamed and not trusted.

A coaching management style creates an atmosphere of trust and enables employees to develop and grow in their role – and to be able to take on new roles with greater responsibility. Such a style would include things like

- listening rather than just telling
- supporting and understanding rather than blaming
- honest and open communication
- consistency and integrity
- empowering people to problem-solve rather than just giving direction
- giving constructive, balanced feedback rather than just criticism
- and a focus on learning and development rather than just the task in hand.

If you are a manager then adopting a coaching style will enable you to have more effective relationships with your team, enable them to learn and develop more quickly, release more of their potential and increase creative problem-solving. By adopting such a style you can create relationships where you can give feedback that is really heard, and where team members will not feel judged and criticised, but supported and developed.

Achieving a coaching management style requires an investment in your own inter-personal skills (which we will examine in the next chapter) and your own personal development. It will be worth it for a number of reasons:

- the improved results from your team
- more effective relationships with your team and other colleagues
- more effective relationships with others outside of work

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You will also stand out to others as bringing a special and different quality to your work as a manager, being supportive to the team by investing and developing them, and, at the same time, gaining improved engagement and better results.

6.5 Conclusion

At work we play roles more explicitly, many of the roles have scripts pre-written and similar roles tend to form into groups and become divided from others. Hierarchy tends to further increase the divisions between us. Bridging those gaps, to enable us to relate to others effectively, particularly becomes the responsibility of managers and leaders. They can adopt and develop a coaching style. In doing so they become role models and through their consistent example can create a coaching culture where all can relate to each other in a much more real way.

This culture of mutual respect offers the prospect of people not only feeling engaged and enjoying their work, but finding that there is the space to offer more of themselves and their unique talents to the organisation.

Developing such a style depends on well-developed inter-personal skills and we will examine these in the next chapter.

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7 Developing your inter-personal skills

In order to develop real, lasting, authentic relationships with others we need to become responsible users of interpersonal dialogue and develop our communication skills. Authentic communication means expressing what you really think and feel right now and when both parties are doing that, there is the potential for real contact between two authentic selves. There can be no deeper or truer communication!

In this chapter we will take an introductory look at some basic tools and techniques that we can use both at home to deepen our personal relationships, and at work to relate more effectively to colleagues and begin to develop a coaching management style. These skills enable us to communicate what we really mean and to listen attentively to what other people are saying.

7.1 Listening

Listening sounds like it is the easiest thing in the world – after all we are constantly hearing sounds and processing them. In fact what we are really doing is constantly editing out background noise and just focussing on what we think is important at the time. So our awareness of what is really going on around us varies. Listening is a particular form of hearing and that involves directing your attention towards the person you are in dialogue with.

Think of a time when you were in a group discussing someone that you were interested in – how much of the time are you really listening and how much of the time are you really just formulating the next thing to say and waiting for a break in the conversation to make your point? You are either listening to your internal dialogue and preparing your next statement or listening to the other person. It is difficult to do both at the same time and impossible to do them both fully.

Effective communication is about one person sending a message whilst the other person is receiving that message, then pausing to digest it and reversing the process.

Without listening properly you can end up making assumptions about what you have heard with the result that the other person can begin to pick up that you have not really been listening or paying attention. Instead of communicating interest, you are communicating disinterest – whether that is true or not.

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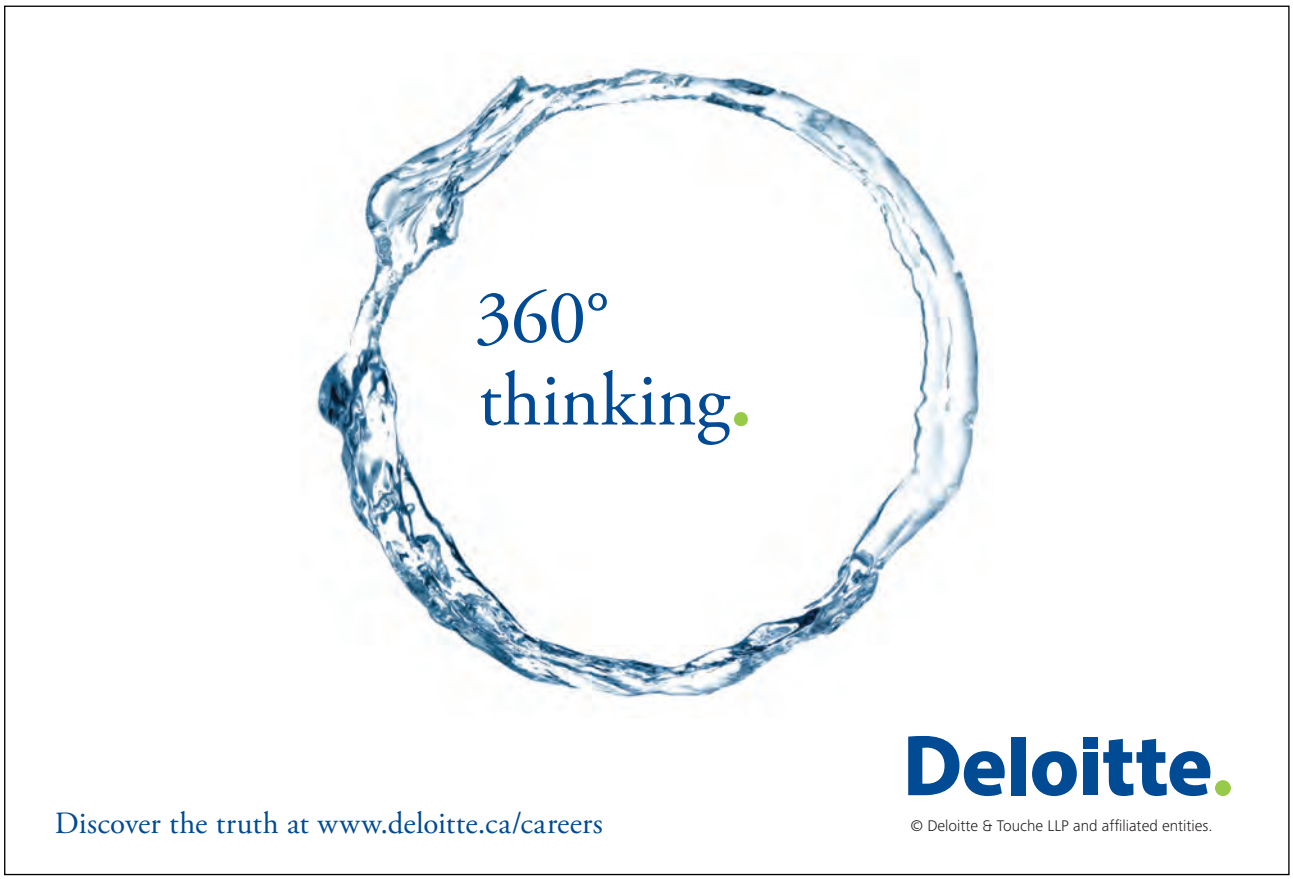
Listening in this sense is focussed awareness and really paying attention to someone is for many an unusual experience and will stand out to them and to others. Feeling heard is important for people to feel valued. If you are in a management or leadership position, then this is a key skill to practise as it is all too easy for people to say "management never listens" – being a manager who does listen will stand out. It is also likely to increase feelings of engagement in your staff.

This form of listening only comes with practice. It requires focussing on the other person and letting the internal static of your chattering mind fade into the background – just not paying it attention. However this is easier said than done. If you are feeling anxious and pre-occupied or in a hurry to be somewhere else, this will come across in the quality of attention that you are able to give the other. The internal voices will persist. You mind keeps calling your attention away from your external senses and back to the chatter.

So we could do with finding a way to help us get out of our mind and back in touch with our senses.

One tried and tested technique to manage this is to focus on our breathing. Many of us breathe at the top of our lungs, breathing from our chest in shallow breaths. Sometimes if we're anxious or pre-occupied we may stop breathing for a while! The most effective way to breathe is deeply, from our diaphragm. This means that instead of our chest rising and falling as we breathe, our lower abdomen expands and contracts with each breath. This has a soothing effect, allowing the anxiety to pass and so helps the mind to clear sufficiently to focus on the other person more fully.



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So, now you have two simple techniques to help you with your listening skills – breathe deeply and focus on the other person with your full attention, undistracted by internal chatter.

7.2 Non-verbal communication

Listening focusses on the words that we hear, however there is a great deal of non-verbal communication that we can also learn to become aware of – in ourselves and others – which can greatly enrich the meaning behind our communications.

Your may not realise it, but your body is communicating all the time, whether you are speaking or not. More than this, when you are speaking, your message might be the same as your words – or the total opposite!

Whilst the other person may not quite know why they are getting mixed messages, human beings are well designed to pick up on non-verbal communication. Paying attention to their – and to your own – non-verbal cues will add an extra dimension to your communication.

So what do we need to become aware of? In any conversation you can start by listening not just to the words, but to the way they are said, the intonation. A simple example is the question "is that your car?" Firstly you will know that it is a question just from the words, as it starts "is that…", whilst other questions could also be statements depending upon the way that they are said and the intonation. For this particular question it could be said in several different ways with a variety of different meanings. We will examine some different versions below.

"Is ***that*** your car?" With the emphasis on the word "that" the question can carry more meaning. Depending upon the intonation on the word "that" it could communicate derision ("I expect you to have a better car than that") or admiration ("I really like your car" or "I didn't expect you to have such a nice car"). Said in a neutral way it could just be for clarification, "is it that one rather than this one?"

"Is that ***your*** car?" Again the emphasis and intonation of the word "your" can communicate different meanings – "is that your car rather than someone else's?", "do you own the car?" or even "have you stolen it?"

"Is that your ***car***?" The intonation on the word "car" could suggest surprise that such a thing is called a car and does not meet with the speaker's expectations. Maybe it is smaller than expected, or it is larger, or maybe it is really a van that is used as a car – or maybe it is a luxury chauffeur-driven limousine!

Aside from intonation, there are other clues in the body too – sighing, shuffling on the chair, looking away, changes in breathing patterns, swallowing hard, frowning – the list goes on.

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Whilst many books on body language give interpretations of various actions and positions, there is no need to interpret them, as doing so is unlikely to lead to a building up of trust! You may have a hunch about what a particular thing means and you may even be correct, but you do not know until you check.

If you see someone swallow hard, you could say something like "I get the feeling that you may be anxious", which is both more truthful and more empowering than saying "you swallowed hard so you must be anxious". It gives the speaker the opportunity to assess what that meant – if anything – and give it a voice. Using this approach you are always encouraging them to take responsibility for their actions and stay in control of the meaning of their communication.

7.3 Pauses and silences

If our approach to listening is really about waiting for the other person to be quiet, so that we can say what we have been thinking about when they have been speaking, then silence will hardly ever happen.

When someone speaks and then pauses, it does not necessarily mean that they are finished – indeed you may often find that the best is yet to come! Maybe the pause does mean that they have finished, in which case you will soon pick this up. They will probably pick up from your pause that you were listening to what they were saying, that you are giving them both space and time to speak without pressure, rather than just waiting to speak.

Silences are difficult for many people to cope with and there is a natural tendency to think we must be saying something, but just leaving these pauses for a few seconds both allows them to formulate that next important sentence and gives you time to digest what has been said and prepare your response.

Hand-in-hand with this is the general principle that you do not interrupt if you want people to feel heard – if someone is speaking, let them work through what they are saying. If you interrupt at every pause for breath then you are not letting them complete that phase of the dialogue and you are effectively taking control of the flow. If you interrupt then the message that they will receive is probably that you are bored and want to speak!

7.4 Summarising and checking

Given that we know we are unlikely to be perfect at listening to all that has been said and given also that what is said is not always what is meant, and that there is a myriad of non-verbal cues which we are likely to miss and even misinterpret, it is sensible to check with the other person that you have heard and understood correctly. It also sends the message that you are interested and wanting to understand them.

There are various ways of doing this and we will examine three of them here.

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1. *Restating*

Firstly you can just check with them, restating something that you have heard for clarification, that is to use your own words to distil what they have said to get to the meaning of it eg – "Can I check I've understood correctly – if you don't speak to your colleague every morning then they think you're deliberately ignoring them?"

2. *Summarising*

Summarising may be useful if the person has been speaking for some time without being interrupted and you have got an overall sense of the themes emerging. Summarising means drawing those themes out and checking whether that is a fair summary of the key points.

It indicates that you have been listening attentively and it allows them the chance to refine the overall message and sense of what they have been saying. It also draws out what you saw as the key points, bringing all the individual pieces of evidence together into one coherent narrative.

3. *Reflecting*

Reflection is used to present feelings and meaning back to the listener as a way of demonstrating your perception of their emotional state. For example "It sounds like you're anxious when meeting with him" or "you feel a little embarrassed by the situation?". They can then confirm whether your reflection is an accurate one or distorted.

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Ultimately the only person who can tell you if you are good at listening is the person speaking – so checking with them that you have understood is really the only way to know if you have been listening effectively.

7.5 Questions

A responsible use of questions can enhance communication by clarifying and getting more data in a neutral way.

For example "what are you feeling now?" is a straight request for information. It has a couple of key characteristics worth noting.

Firstly it is an open question, rather than a closed question. It cannot just be answered with a yes or no reply, instead it requires the listener to examine the situation and report the answer, which could be anything – including "I don't feel anything now".

Secondly it is not a leading question – i.e. it is not pre-judging or suggesting how they might be feeling, whilst "are you feeling sad?" is suggesting a feeling to them and they have to evaluate the situation in the light of that suggestion. Another distortion would be "are you still feeling sad?" which not only suggests that they could be feeling sad, it assumes that they were feeling sad and the use of "still" probably suggests that they should not be feeling sad now.

As you can see, "what are you feeling now?" is a neutral request when compared to "are you still feeling sad?" and a much more responsible use of questions.

However even this open, neutral question is leading to some degree as it sets the agenda. Inevitably a question demands a response. The questioner has taken some power in the conversation and is directing the thoughts of the other to give a certain type of response. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate to use statements.

7.6 Statements

A responsible use of statements can enhance communication. A good neutral statement is factual and free of judgement, reporting how something actually is. For example "after you opened the window I began to feel cold".

There may be certain conversations where you do not want to be at all directive and you want to express what you are really thinking and feeling, so a statement can be used. For example "I'm wondering what you are feeling now." This is a statement that may provoke the same response as a question yet leaves the person feeling in control – there is no driving of the agenda, it is merely an honest reporting of what is going on in the first individual – i.e. they are wondering.

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A responsible use of statements also requires being careful about hidden meanings. One issue to be aware of is the use of the words "but" and "however". If possible try and replace the words "but" and "however" with "and" – in this way you are reporting two facts of equal weighting. The use of "but" and "however" implies a negative attitude towards the first part of the statement – in effect any positive elements of the first part of the sentence are negated by the words "but" and "however".

For example – "your report is very good **but** I have some amendments to make", suggests that really the report is not very good as it need correcting. Whilst "your report is very good and I have some amendments to make" is simply reporting a fact in a much more neutral way. The use of the words "but" and "however" demonstrate that there is a problem in the first part of the sentence.

7.7 Conclusion

The responsible use of language and communication will depend upon the circumstances. For example in some situations it is appropriate to be leading and to drive the agenda – e.g. in a task-focussed work conversation with a more junior member of staff. In a personal development conversation, or a creative meeting with an equal colleague the agenda could be much more free-flowing and you would drive it less. This might include a greater use of statements and fewer questions.

At home between partners the use of these more developed inter-personal skills are likely to lead to both people feeling like true partners and able to relate to each other as equals. Honest reporting of what each person is thinking and feeling, in an accepting atmosphere where each pays attention to the other, is much more likely to lead to a positive outcome instead of the use of projection, denial, blame and not listening.

Now that you are aware of these basic tools and techniques you can re-examine how you want to relate to others in your various roles at home and at work. You can begin to try out the techniques and practise them, adopting the ones that suit you well to develop a personal style of responsible communication that allows you to express your true authentic self and enhance the quality of your inter-personal relationships.

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8 Conclusion

Finding yourself is probably the most significant thing you can do to improve your quality of life. Getting in touch with who and what you really are will improve your relationship with yourself and your relationships with others, whether they are at home or at work.

Understanding ourselves and relating to others is a lifetime's work. Our understanding of ourselves tends to increase naturally over time anyway as we get tested and gain feedback through life's experiences. Making a choice to understand ourselves opens up for each of us a unique journey of personal growth and development. As we understand ourselves more, we can become more accepting of ourselves.

We have looked at a range of ways in which we can create greater understanding of ourselves through increased self-awareness. We can become aware of our priorities at our current stage of life, the roles we play, the scripts we follow and what drives our sense of identity. We can seek out feedback and monitor our own language for hidden clues to our out-dated internal book of rules. We can become aware of our prejudices and assumptions about others.

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As we become more accepting of ourselves, we open up the possibility of being more accepting of others. We can understand that others feel vulnerable too and take steps to protect themselves. They develop a range of personae to present themselves in a certain way, they operate from their own scripts and roles. You can realise that they may not be responding to you but to your role, or their prejudices about you or their projections onto you – you do not need to take all reactions to you personally!

Certain roles, such as management and leadership, tend to bear a greater level of these barriers and distortions than others. Whether you are the manager or the person being managed, actively choosing to overcome these barriers will mean an increase in the level of inter-personal skills needed. A desire amongst managers and leaders to increase staff engagement and unlock potential in others, will often mean adopting and developing a coaching style.

All relationships will improve when you take greater responsibility for your communication skills and the quality of your inter-personal dialogue. A range of techniques can help, such as active listening, picking up on non-verbal cues, working with pauses and silence, summarising and checking, knowing when and how to make a statement, and when and how to ask a question.

Life is not about pleasing others and playing roles scripted by others, but about being our true selves and exploring the unique potential within each of us. We can all make a choice to follow that path. It is our own unique path, one that has never been trodden before – and will not be again. We make that choice not just now but constantly. Every moment creates a new opportunity to be in touch with yourself and act in line with your authentic nature.

As you increase your self-understanding and get back in touch with your true self, you will feel freer to operate as an autonomous individual, fulfil your potential, respond creatively to the changing world and develop deeper more productive relationships. You will operate in tune with yourself whilst being sensitive to the needs of others, expressing yourself in your own uniquely creative way – and this will be recognised by others as the charisma of true authenticity.